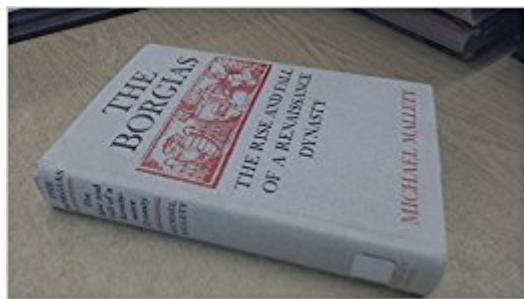


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The Borgias: The Rise And Fall Of A Renaissance Dynasty



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Customer Reviews

The author's stated intention is to explain the Borgia phenomenon, not to rehabilitate the family. The Borgias were Spanish nobles of moderate standing who succeeded in inserting themselves into the upper strata of Renaissance society via the Catholic church. The election of one member of the family as Pope Calixtus III prepared the way for the notorious Alexander VI and for many cardinals and rulers in Naples, Italy, France and Spain. The activities of Alexander (Rodrigo Borgia), his children Cesare and Lucrezia, and the lewd legends of incest and poisoning that have surrounded them have attracted the attention of poets, playwrights, novelists and historians of all subsequent generations. Mallett succeeds in answering the questions, Who were the Borgias?, and, What were they doing in 15th century Italy that made them so hated and feared? The history is very thorough, starting with a discussion of the Renaissance Papacy, the Papal States in the 15th century, and the pontificate of Calixtus III. The election of Alexander VI up to the death of Alexander makes for the most exciting reading, while the last two chapters deal with the subsequent fortunes of the Borgia dynasty and the Borjas of Gandia. Genealogical tables include the Borja family of Jativa, the family of Alexander VI, the family of the dukes of Gandia, plus the Colonna, Orsini and Della Rovere families. There are extensive Notes and an exhaustive bibliography plus a thorough index. Text figures include a map of the Papal States in the 15th century, woodcut views of Rome from 1480 and 1492 and a map of the Roman Campagna. The sixteen black and white plates include portraits of Calixtus III, Alexander VI, Cesare Borgia, Alfonso d'Este and photographs of Bracciano and Nepi castles, the Torre Borgia and the Sala dei Santi in the Borgia Apartments. Mallett's book is well-written and refreshingly free of sensationalism. He paints the bigger picture without getting lost

in the complicated details of Italian politics in 15th century Italy and brings all the important individuals to life on these pages. I also recommend the excellent *The Borgias* by Marion Johnson for readers interested in this colourful and notorious Renaissance family.

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The book was well-researched and did much toward clearing Lucretia of any charges of involvement in the schemes of her father and brother -- beyond being a pawn. It also goes deeply into the decades before Rodrigo became Pope Alexander IV, during the reign of his uncle Pope Calixtus III. However, the writing style does not move along quickly so the average reader might find him/herself bored with the history.

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